

Regulating the Ottomans on Turkish Television and the Making of Good Citizens

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Abstract : This paper takes up the proliferating historical dramas and children's programs featuring the Ottoman-Islamic legacy on Turkish television as a locus where the processes of subjectification take place. A critical analysis of this emergent cultural phenomenon reveals an alliance of neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalities based on which the Turkish media is restructured to transform society. The existing debates have focused on how the Ottoman historical dramas manifest the Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) neo-Ottomanist ideology and foreign policy. However, this approach tends to overlook the more complex relationship between the media, government, and society. Employing Michel Foucault's notion of 'technologies of the self,' this paper aims to examine the governing practices that are deployed to regulate the media and to transform individual citizens into governable subjects in contemporary Turkey. First, through a brief discussion of recent development of the Turkish media towards an authoritarian model, the paper suggests that the relation between the Ottoman television drama and the political subject in question cannot be adequately examined without taking into account the force of the market. Second, by focusing on the managerial restructuring of the Turkish Television and Radio Corporation (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu), the paper aims to illustrate the rationale and process through which the Turkish media sector is transformed into an integral part of the free market where the government becomes a key actor. The paper contends that this new sphere of free market is organized in a way that enables direct interference of the government and divides media practitioners and consumers into opposing categories through their own participation in the media market. On the one hand, a 'free subject' is constituted based on the premise that the market is a sphere where individuals are obliged to exercise their right to freedom (of choice, lifestyle, and expression). On the other hand, this 'free subject' is increasingly subjugated to such disciplinary practices as censorship for being on the wrong side of the government. Finally, the paper examines the relation between the restructured Turkish media market and the proliferation of Ottoman television drama in the 2010s. The study maintains that the reorganization of the media market has produced a condition where private sector is encouraged to take an active role in reviving Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic cultural heritage and promulgating moral-religious values. Paying specific attention to the controversial case of Magnificent Century (Muhteşem Yüzyıl) in contrast with TRT's Ottoman historical drama and children's programs, the paper aims to identify the ways in which individual citizens are directed to conduct themselves as a virtuous citizenry. It is through the double movement between the governing practices associated with the media market and those concerning the making of a 'conservative generation' that a subject of citizenry of new Turkey is constituted.

Keywords : neoconservatism, neoliberalism, ottoman historical drama, technologies of the self, Turkish television

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